

FACULTY OF MUSIC UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

A Concert of Works by John Beckwith

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Walter Hall

Saturday, March 17, 1990

6:00 pm

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THE HISTORY OF THE

REPUBLIC OF THE UNITED STATES

The history of the Republic of the United States is a story of the struggle for freedom and justice for all. It is a story of the founding fathers who created a new nation, and of the people who have fought to make it a better place for everyone.

The story begins with the first settlers who came to the Americas. They were men and women who sought a new life, a new land. They found a land of opportunity, but also a land of hardship. They fought to survive, and in the process, they created a new society.

As the years passed, the settlers grew in number. They built a new nation, one that was based on the principles of liberty and justice. They fought for their rights, and they won. They created a new way of life, one that was better than the one they had left behind.

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A Concert of Works by John Beckwith

performed by his colleagues and former students
on the occasion of his retirement from the University of Toronto as
Jean A. Chalmers Professor of Canadian Music
and
Director of the Institute for Canadian Music

PROGRAM

- | | |
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| Old Meg Merillies (Keats) | 1988 |
| Patricia Kern, mezzo-soprano; William Aide, piano | |
| from Eight Miniatures from the Ash Collection | 1981 |
| Darby O'Kelby | |
| The Queen of Prussia's waltz | |
| Sheep in a cluster | |
| Ye banks and braes | |
| Untitled reel 2 | |
| Lawrence Beckwith, violin; John Beckwith, piano | |
| Sharon Fragments (Willson) | 1966 |
| University of Toronto Concert Choir | |
| James Pinhorn, conductor | |
| Arctic Dances | 1984 |
| (based on dance-song transcriptions from Beverley Cavanagh's <i>Music of the Nelsilik Eskimo</i>) | |
| Lawrence Cherney, oboe; William Aide, piano | |
| Duo on H.E.S.A.E.S. | 1984 |
| Curtis Dietz and Melody Stepto, trumpets | |

Etudes

1983

Opposed sonorities 1
Repeated notes and octaves
Glides
Opposed sonorities 2
Harp
Clusters and chords

Mark Widner, piano

Six songs to poems by e.e. cummings

1980-82

buy me an ounce and i'll sell you a pound
ITEM
"o purple finch
Jimmie's got a goil
that melancholy
let it go

Gary Relyea, baritone; William Aide, piano

College Airs

1990

(based on excerpts from Canadian university song collections)

St. Lawrence String Quartet

Geoff Nuttall and Barry Shiffman, violins;
Lesley Robertson, viola; Marina Hoover, cello

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NOTES

The setting of John Keats' 1818 ballad about the Northumbrian gypsy Meg Merillies (a character in two novels by Scott) was originally meant to be sung by Agatha in *Crazy to Kill*, the "detective opera" by James Reaney and myself. I have retrieved it from the cutting-room floor, and this evening's will be its first performance. Melody and accompaniment use only "white notes".

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In preparing settings of nineteenth-century musical Canadiana for the inaugural "Music at Sharon" festival in 1981, I delved into the Allen Ash Collection, a manuscript compiled by Ash, a nineteenth-century farmer, fiddler, fiddle maker, and (perhaps) composer, of the Newcastle region in South-Central Ontario. It contains one hundred

pieces--dances, marches, popular songs--indicating the sort of music ordinary Upper Canadians were used to hearing and performing, especially in rural districts, before Confederation. Some tunes are untraceable, others are well known but notated by Ash with odd variant details. After arranging some excerpts for an instrumental ensemble at Sharon, I chose others to form a little cycle in which solo violin plays (virtually unchanged) the Ash melodies and a piano contributes some modest period harmonies. The *Miniatures* are dedicated to Lawrence Beckwith.

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The choral work *Sharon Fragments* was commissioned by the Waterloo Lutheran University (now Wilfrid Laurier University) Choir and their then director Walter Kemp (a former student of mine) and first performed by them in 1966. The "fragments" are excerpts I selected from the poetry and prose writings of David Willson (1778-1886), founder of the Children of Peace sect in Sharon, near Newmarket. Three close friends, Helmut Kallmann, Keith MacMillan, and James Reaney, stimulated me to look into these writings, and they deepened my sense of the remarkableness of the sect's ideas, already roused by visits to their great wooden temple. The composition is based on two eighteenth-century English hymn-tunes, versions of which I heard on the Sharon barrel organ: "Wells" by Israel Holdroyd and "Armley" by Thomas Williams. Years later I learned from Richard Crawford's *The Core Repertory of Early American Psalmody* that "Wells" was the most frequently reprinted of eighteenth-century hymn-tunes on this continent before 1800. There is strong evidence of the familiarity of both tunes to early Canadians, however much they may have disappeared from memory in later times, and they seemed to me a suitable vehicle for Willson's thoughts. Reaney, to whom I dedicated the *Fragments*, calls Willson "the first Canadian philosopher". The *Fragments* have been performed by many choirs in Canada and the U.S., and were recorded by Elmer Iseler with the Festival Singers of Canada. That organization even let me conduct the piece once. It is by no means easy to perform, and it therefore surprises me that it is (as far as I can tell) my most-often-done work.

Text from writings by David Willson (1778-1886)

- I. I know not my own form; I have a beginning, but know not the end, because my life is not finished according to thy will...I wander in the earth,...seeking a city where I may find friends...I see myself more miserable than other men...I hear men talk of heaven and the terrors of hell; but...I must be between these two kingdoms, where none are willing to dwell with me but God alone.
- II.

Cloth'd with some terror from on high,	The Lord gives me mine end to see
I hear a voice that I must die!	That I must go where princes be,
My heart doth flutter and remove	Where kings and queens do lose their crown
From everything I dearly love.	And with the worm in earth lie down.
- III. All things written in the Scriptures have (orig. *hath*) been known to the mind from whence they did proceed, and are revealed to us by human beings -- the family of God whom he hath chosen to be loving, kind, and tender parents to the world.

IV. With the pen I have drawn the lines of his spirit as to me they have been given. They are not the hand-writing of the scribe or eloquent in speech; they originated in my mind, and I commit them to memory as a debt I owe to the Lord.

V. O Lord, the stone will not remove
Where thou has plac'd redeeming love.
A broken heart, a humble mind,
Will mercy at thy portals find.

The proud are lost in troubl'd seas,
Or, as the fowl, toss'd in the breeze;
With a false hope their mind's impress'd
Seeking, but never finding rest.

The worlds depart, the heavens flee,
And death and hell is where they be;
O humble mind! more sure abode!
The place and pathway of our God.

VI. Life inspires all our actions. The body can feel nothing, but it touches the mind, therefore it is the man within that is the life of the body, and exists in all our limbs.

VII. We have built a habitation for the poor and ignorant...*Peace* is our motto and *Union* our praise...Contentment crowns our offerings, and our time is spent in the praise of the Lord.

VIII. Oh Gilead's joy, where is thy spring,
Or healing that thy balm affords?
Oh, where do Zion's children sing,
Or Jesus loose the binding cords?

O Lord, where doth the city stand,
Or the bless'd kingdom of thine own?
Where is that lost, but promis'd land,
Which was to sons of Israel known?

My soul doth rest, I know not why
My spirit doth in secret sing;
The kingdom of my God is nigh,
My soul doth taste the joyful spring.

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Arctic Dances was commissioned by the two artists who perform it tonight, with a grant from the Ontario Arts Council. I was interested in the ground-breaking study of Inuit dance-songs by Beverley Diamond Cavanagh (a member of my "Music of North America" course as an undergraduate), and considered the potential her transcriptions might have for compositional elaboration. With the invitation from Cherney and Aide, I thought of a model--Mieczyslaw Kolinski's *Dahomey Suite* for oboe and piano, based on West-African materials. The fact that Kolinski was both Cavanagh's teacher and an influential scholar and good friend in my own development made the connection a natural one. The *Dances* are dedicated to his memory. Beverley Cavanagh received assurances from her Inuit informants that the materials could be treated in a free creative fashion without offense to their original cultural purposes. Both instruments afforded opportunities to evoke (somewhat abstractly) the

character of Inuit performances (which I know only from descriptions and recordings)--the nasality of singing tone, a characteristic and quite theatrical exhaling at phrase-ends, an occasional counterpoint of bird calls, and of course the throat-game rhythms. The cycle is in several sections corresponding to the scalic character of the groups of songs I drew on, and within each section several tunes are treated, often quite repetitively. The whole has a classical European parallel, in my view, in the chains of short dances such as those of Schubert (*German dances*, *Sentimental waltzes*), which I've always liked.

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Henry Mutsaers, superb copyist, and confidant of every composer in Canada, retired after many years as national librarian of the Canadian Music Centre in 1984, and to mark the event composers were invited to write short works in his honor. My contribution, the *Duo* for trumpets, uses a musical anagram formed from those letters in his name that are also note-names (H being B-natural in German notation, and S being E-flat).

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The six solo-piano *Etudes* were commissioned by the Vancouver New Music Society on a grant from the Canada Council, and first played by Jane Coop (a graduate of the Faculty) in Vancouver in 1984. She has recorded them. Mark Widner gave the first Toronto performance in 1987. Several performances were given in 1989 by Charles Foreman (another Faculty graduate and former student) during his Western Canadian tour.

The piano was the main subject in my formal professional education and keyboard parts are a feature of many of my works; but the *Etudes* constituted my first solo concert work for the piano since the *Novelette* of 1951. Rather than employ the prepared and inside-the-piano sounds so widely used in the mid-century (and which I myself have used elsewhere), I chose to take a fresh look at the various physical actions of fingers and hand in piano playing, using them as departure points for a series of compositional essays. This could be seen as a parallel approach to that of Chopin, Debussy, Scriabin, and others, in their études. Such pieces suggest a dual sense of the term "study"--a study in an aspect of performance skill which becomes at the same time a study in abstract musical design and expression.

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The *Six songs to poems by e.e. cummings* were introduced by Mark Pedrotti and William Aide in a Faculty Artists series concert in 1983. The work is a baritone sequel to the *Four songs to poems by e.e. cummings* for soprano, which I composed in 1950 for Lois Marshall. I have often returned to cummings' writings and was especially moved to read the Kennedy biography in the late 1970s. That may have been what stimulated me one day in 1980 to write down the music that had always seemed (in my head) appropriate for "Jimmie's goil", that gem of the 1920s burlesque stage. In succeeding months, between other compositional tasks, I added settings of five other favorite poems.

I found I was in awe of the syllabic wizardry of the first and third texts--the latter a perfect parable in just forty-eight syllables. I cherished two contrasting urban vignettes (nos. 2 and 5 of the set)--the one a brittle 1920s satire

and the other a touching commentary on an actual encounter of the poet's on New York's 14th Street, an organ grinder with a fortune-telling cockatoo. The final text is a comment on love, from one of the greatest of lyricists.

1.

buy me an ounce and i'll sell you a pound.
Turn
gert
 (spin!
helen)the
slimmer the finger the thicker the thumb(it's
whirl,
girls)
round and round

early to better is wiser for worse.

Give

liz

 (take!

tommy)we

order a steak and they send us a pie(it's

try,

boys)

mine is yours

ask me the name of the moon in the man.

Up

sam

 (down!

alice)a

hole in the ocean will never be missed(it's

in,

girls)

yours is mine

either was deafer than neither was dumb.

Skip

fred

 (jump!

neddy)but

under the wonder is over the why(it's

now,

boys)

here we come

-50 Poems
1940

2.

ITEM

this man is o so

Waiter

this;woman is

please shut that
the pout And affectionate leer
interminable pyramidal,napkins
(this man is oh so tired of this
a door opens by itself
woman.) they so to speak were in

Love once?

now

her mouth opens too far
and:she attacks her Lobster without
feet mingle under the
mercy.

(exit the hors d'œuvres)

- is 5
1926

3.

"o purple finch

please tell me why
this summer world(and you and i
who love so much to live)

must die"

"if i

should tell you anything"
(that eagerly sweet carolling
self answers me)

"i could not sing"

-73 Poems
1963

4.

Jimmie's got a goil

goil

goil,

Jimmie

's got a goil and
she coitnly can shimmi

when you see her shake

shake

shake,

when

you see her shake a
shimmie how you wish that you was Jimmie.

Oh for such a gurl

gurl

gurl,

oh

for such a gurl to
be a fellow's twistandtwirl

talk about your Sal-

Sal-

Sal-,

talk

**about your Salo
-mes but gimmie Jimmie's gal.**

-is5

1926

5.

that melancholy

**fellow'll play
his handorgan
until you say**

"i want a fortune"

**.At which(smiling)he stops:
& pick
ing up a magical stick
t,a,p,s**

this dingy cage:then with a ghost

's rainfaint windthin
voice-which-is
no-voice sobcries

“paw?lee”

—whereupon out(SIO
wLy)steps(to
mount the wand)a by no
means almost

white morethanPerson;who

(riding through space
to diminutive this
opened drawer)tweak

S with his brutebeak

one fatal faded (pinkish or
yellowish maybe) piece
of pitiful paper—
but now, as Mr bowing Cockaton

proffers the meaning of the stars

14th st dis(because my tears
are full of eyes)appears. Because
only the truest things always

are true because they can't be true

-95 Poems
1958

6.

let it go—the
smashed word broken
open vow or
the oath cracked length
wise—let it go it
was sworn to
go

let them go—the
truthful liars and
the false fair friends
and the boths and
neithers—you must let them go they
were born

to go

let all go—the
big small middling
tall bigger really
the biggest and all
things—let all go
dear

so comes love

-1 x 1
1944

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College airs was commissioned in celebration of the life of Wallace G. Chalmers by his wife Clarice, for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Orford Quartet, who presented its première last month.

The commission specified a short piece suitable for the University of Toronto quartet-in-residence to play at informal University functions. As a reference to Wallace Chalmers's engineering career, it was thought I might like to quote the theme of the notorious Lady Godiva Memorial Band (which more recent news items suggest may soon undergo a name change). Other possible allusions sprang to mind since coincidentally I had been working with a research team on the history of Canadian college song publications.

The period title is meant to suggest a memory piece. From an abstract continuity fragments of five tunes emerge, some familiar, others forgotten, all associated with the University of Toronto. "Son of a Gambolier," a Yale song, appears in the earliest U of T song book (1887). "Deus refugium nostrum" comes from *The University Hymn Book* (1912) and was composed by Ernest Campbell MacMillan, then a nineteen-year-old modern-history freshman. Clayton Bush's (1909) "The Blue and White" remains the "official" U of T song. The Godiva tune, though widely known, is not indigenous, being a version of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic". H.H. Godfrey's "Toronto, the pride of the north" appeared in a U of T collection of 1899. As the march rhythms become more insistent, another tune occurs--an original (though deliberately unoriginal-sounding) tune conceived as the quintessence of "Alma Mater rah-rah-rah." In the spirit of nostalgia, and also of fun, there are several interruptions of it; the work in fact ends in "mid-air."

-- J.B.

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NOTES ON THE PERFORMERS

by Lawrence Beckwith and John Beckwith

Patricia Kern is an adjunct professor of voice, and has been a member of the Faculty of Music since 1980. Well known to opera audiences in Canada, the U.S., and Britain, she has sung with many companies, including the Welsh National Opera, Covent Garden and Chicago Lyric Opera.

William Aide has been with the Faculty of Music since 1977. A graduate of 1959, he was in John Beckwith's materials-of-music class as an undergraduate. He performed in the première of the composer's *Keyboard Practice* (1979) and in 1988 was soloist in a revival of his *Concerto Fantasy* for piano and orchestra (1960). He has been heard as orchestral soloist in concerti by Beethoven and Liszt this season.

Lawrence Beckwith graduated with an M.A. in musicology in 1989. John Beckwith was among his teachers. He is the violinist of the baroque ensemble, Arbor Oak Trio, and directs one choir and sings in three others.

James Pinhorn graduated in 1989 with a Mus.Bac. in performance. He has returned to the Faculty of Music this season as a special student, studying with Professor Doreen Rao. He is the assistant conductor of the University of Toronto Concert Choir.

Lawrence Cherney graduated in 1978 with a Mus.M. in performance. Though not a University of Toronto student of Beckwith's, he has collaborated closely with him in concerts of the "Music at Sharon" series annually since 1981, among other projects, and is the dedicatee of one of the six psalms in Beckwith's *Harp of David* (1985). Cherney has an international career as oboist, and has performed *Arctic Dances* on many of his concerts, besides recording the work for McGill Records. He is the director of the organization Chamber Concerts Canada.

Curtis Dietz and Melody Stepto are both currently in the third year of the Faculty of Music performance-degree program.

Mark Widner received his Mus.M. in performance in 1983, and was a member of Beckwith's music-literature course. He is with the music department at Brock University, and performs regularly with such Toronto organizations as New Music Concerts. In 1989, he was the pianist/orderly in the première of *Crazy to Kill* at the Guelph Spring Festival.

Gary Relyea is an alumnus of the Faculty's performance program. He was a student of Beckwith's in twentieth-century music. Relyea's busy career covers operatic, solo-concert, orchestral, and choral-society appearances throughout Canada. He gave a well-received recital in the Music Toronto series at St. Lawrence Centre last month, at which he performed the cummings songs.

The St. Lawrence String Quartet is jointly sponsored by the University of Toronto and the Royal Conservatory under the supervision of Lorand Fenyes and Denis Brott. The Quartet was recently appointed resident string quartet at the Claude Watson School of the Arts.

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gratefully acknowledges the generous support of
Jean and Floyd Chalmers and their family
to endow this tribute to John Beckwith.

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